OBSERVATIONS

ON A

PAMPHLET,

ENTITLED,

"Christianity not founded on Argument."

By a CHRISTIAN FREETHINKER,

Who apprehends that INFIDELS cannot be *effectually* answered, on any PRINCIPLES less general, than those which he has adopted.

☞ The only apology he can make for publishing (at this distance of time) animadversions on a pamphlet printed so long since, is, that he has just now (and never before) perused it with that design.

LONDON,

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ADVERTISEMENT.

THE author of the following obſervations having often, in the courſe of his own reading, regretted the want of ample, and fair quotations, from the writers whoſe works have been criticiſed by others; has thought it would be much more convenient, and, conſequently, more acceptable to his readers, to lay before them the paſſages of the writer, on whom he animadverts, more fully than is cuſtomary, and in his own words; both, that he might do juſtice to that writer, and alſo, that his own reaſoning might be more readily comprehended; and this inſtead of referring a reader

to

to pages of a pamphlet which he may not have in his hands.

And though the Bible is ſuppoſed to be in every one's poſſeſſion, yet when texts are referred to, only, without citing the words, few readers will give themſelves the trouble to turn to every paſſage, while reading; how proper, and reaſonable ſoever it may be ſo to do; theſe therefore are alſo cited at length, as they occur; which practice the author has frequently wiſhed were more general.

ERRATA.

Page 2. line 10. for *church-tranſubſtantiation*, read *church, tranſubſtantiation*,—p. 6. l. 13. dele *as*—p. 7. l. 7. for *juſty* read *juſtly*—l. 17. for *Creature* read *Creator*—p. 17. l. 7. for *approbriouſly* read *opprobriouſly*—l. 9. for *contractions* read *conſtructions*—p. 19. l. 14. for *this* read *they*—p. 34. l. 7. for *of the Cape?* read *a native of the Cape?*—p. 36. l. 30. for *repeated* read *repeated*—p. 40. l. 32. for *more* read *mere*

OBSER-

OBSERVATIONS

On the PAMPHLET, entitled,

"Chriſtianity not founded on Argument."

In a LETTER to a young Gentleman at *Oxford*.

THIRD EDITION, 1746.

THIS piece is, apparently, a continued irony from beginning to end; and there is no room to doubt, but that the author himſelf would deſpiſe the underſtanding of any reader who ſhould take him ſeriouſly.

It is however to be lamented, that ſo ample a field ſhould be afforded him for the diſplay of his ſophiſtry, and that ſo many unneceſſary and indefenſible ramparts ſhould be raiſed, which only expoſe an, otherwiſe, impregnable citadel to the attacks of his maſked batteries: for, to ſpeak without a figure, if the defenders of the Goſpel would content themſelves with aſſerting, and maintaining pure, original Chriſtianity, in its primitive ſimplicity, without any human additions, they might *eaſily* baffle their moſt ſubtle adverſaries; whereas, by weak and inconſiſtent ſyſtems, creeds, articles, and catechiſms which cannot be authoriſed, or ſupported by Scripture, they render the beſt cauſe in the world liable to the aſſaults of in-

fidels,

fidels, who groundleſsly triumph on the demolition of thoſe outworks, as if they had effectually carried the place. And, in truth, the misfortune is, that the generality of Chriſtians being ſuch merely by education, know not how to ſeparate the factitious parts from the eſſence of Chriſtianity, and are therefore ſtaggered, if not confounded, by the ſpecious arguments which they cannot unravel. Thus, if the infallibility of the pope, or the church-tranſubſtantiation, the miracles of modern ſaints, and other matters, held for certain and ſacred, are expoſed, a vulgar Roman catholic apprehends Chriſtianity itſelf endangered; and, in like manner, among Lutherans, Calviniſts, and other ſects, if their diſtinguiſhing tenets are examined, and ſome of them ſhewn to be falſe, and abſurd, and incompatible with the attributes of the Deity, as well as with Scripture, ſuch who are of any of theſe perſuaſions are apt to imagine Chriſtianity can no longer be defended than while their ſyſtems are reſpectively ſecured.

The argumentation, of the author in queſtion, is altogether *ad hominem*, or rather *ad Anglicanum*; for he proceeds throughout upon this ſuppoſition as granted, That the profeſſion of the church of England, and Chriſtianity, are the ſame thing: and it were to be wiſhed that this ſuppoſition did not furniſh ſo many advantages to his cauſe; for he is too ſagacious a writer not to ſee, that had he confined himſelf wholly and honeſtly to the Scriptures, and to ſuch a fair and candid interpretation of them, as he ſeems well qualified to have made, his repreſentation of this religion muſt have appeared extremely different from what he has exhibited.

A few

A few inſtances will fully juſtify this aſſertion. Page 9. his words are:

" Can a man be baptized into a rational religi-
" on? Where is reaſon concerned, when babes
" accept the terms of ſalvation by deputy, and are
" entitled to all the privileges of the moſt extenſive
" faith by another's act? By the baptiſmal cere-
" mony, they commence true believers at once,
" and are made heirs of heaven, *you know*, by the
" faith of their bondſmen, whilſt as yet they have
" not the leaſt ſhare or ſymptom of underſtand-
" ing themſelves, and may in all poſſibility never
" live to attain one; and which, if they had at
" any time, I know not yet how they could well
" give a rational aſſent by proxy; yet ſuch is the
" pleaſure and ordinance of God himſelf in this
" point."

Here is an appeal to a member of the church of England, who will find it difficult to reply to ſuch a ridiculous remonſtrance with *you know*, &c. but what is this to the purpoſe, or how is real Chriſtianity affected? If it be true, as it moſt certainly is, that there is no precept in the New Teſtament, for infant-baptiſm, nor any warrant, *there*, for aſſerting an imputed faith (by ſuch means) without which they could not be ſaved: much leſs for ſponſors, or for the pretence at the cloſe of this paſſage, that, *ſuch is the pleaſure and ordinance of God himſelf in this point.* Which he could not have had the confidence to ſay, if he had not addreſſed himſelf to one who could not contradict him without departing from his profeſſed principles.—Whereas one of a different perſuaſion, or a Chriſtian at large, might eaſily have

ſilenced him, on this head, and reſcued his religion from ſo abſurd a charge.

Again, p. 15.—" let his (*i. e. of a perſon ſearching after the truth*) " natural obligations, as he " may pretend, be never ſo obvious, and ſelf-evi- " dent, and his practice never ſo ſtrictly con- " formable; what if without this previous ac- " quiſition, and devout temper, I contend for, " the beſt of lives is no circumſtance to re- " commend, or qualify us for *any regard* from " the throne of grace? *Good works done before* " *faith*, and without the eſpecial influence of this " ſaving principle, are ſo far from being accepted " in themſelves, as the terms of a complete obe- " dience, that they do not ſo much as put men " into a nearer ſtate for favour, or a capacity of " being the ſooner enlightened; they do not, as " our church expreſſes it, make men *meet to re-* " *ceive grace*. The exacteſt obſerver of moral " laws is a vile and wretched ſinner in God's ac- " count, as long as he proceeds by human lights, " and motives, and upon the ſtrength of mere " ethics only. Nay, even his moſt virtuous actions " themſelves are highly criminal, and diſpleaſing " to God, as long as he continues in ſuch a diſ- " poſition of mind, as they are undoubtedly of " a nature corrupted, and unregenerate, *for* " *whatſoever is not of faith, is ſin*.—The un- " quiet eſſays of reaſoning, curious diſquiſitions " upon his being, and attributes, and the truth, " and authenticneſs of revelation, are practices " utterly inconſiſtent with the pretenſions of all " ſuch as *call themſelves Chriſtians*, or expect any " benefit from the Goſpel-covenant, to which they

" are always presumed parties. *We must be pro-*
" *vided of our creed before we are warranted to*
" *pray so much as for faith itself. We must not lift*
" *up our hands to heaven with doubting.*"

This passage contains notions utterly inconsistent with the divine attributes, contrary to reason, and to the whole tenor of Scripture, as well as particularly injurious to the Gospel of Christ. As for the Scriptures, they abound with general expressions subversive of such doctrines, such as, *In every nation he that feareth God, and worketh righteousness, is accepted of him.* And Rom. ii. 14, 15. *The Gentiles which have not the law, do by nature the things contained in the law, these having not the law, are a law unto themselves: which shew the work of the law written in their hearts, their conscience also bearing witness, and their thoughts the mean while accusing, or else excusing one another.* And iv. 15. *Where no law is, there is no trangression.* And Micah vi. 3. *What doth the Lord require of thee, but to do justly, and to love mercy, and to walk humbly with thy God?* —With a multitude of such like, shewing the Deity's approbation and acceptance of a moral conduct. In the Gospel, besides the sermon on the mount, and the representation of the last day by Christ, when every man shall be finally judged by the works he has done, *good* or *bad*, and many passages to the same purpose, there is a particular recital of a conversation with one who came running and kneeling to Jesus, Mark x. 17. &c. to whom after recommending the keeping of the commandments, and the person's answering that he had kept them from his youth, it is said, v. 21.

Then

Then Jesus beholding him, loved him.—It is true, he lacked one thing, and that was charity, another moral virtue, but not such an enthusiastic and groundless faith as this writer pretends to be necessary: (see p. 10, 11, 12, 13.) and though he wanted that one thing, yet Jesus loved him for what he had already attained. And he pronounced, on a like occasion, to one of the Scribes who had answered, That to love God with all the heart, and understanding, and soul, and strength, and to love his neighbour as himself, was more than all whole burnt-offerings and sacrifices, as that he was not far from the kingdom of God, Mark xii. 34. And the case of Cornelius, Acts, chap. x. is in point, and directly contradicts this author's assertion in the last quoted passage, viz. " *That the best of lives is no* " *circumstance* to recommend, or qualify us for " any regard from the throne of grace; good " works done before faith, &c. are so far from " being accepted (as the terms of a complete " obedience) that they do not so *much as put men* " *into a nearer state for favour*, or a capacity of " being the sooner enlightened; they do not, as " our church expresses it, make *men meet to receive* " *grace*;" with the rest of this passage, as above cited.—On the contrary, the very reason given why new light was afforded to Cornelius, was, that his good works, his prayers, and his alms *were come up for a memorial* before God. See v. 4. of the above chapter.

Again, p. 17. " We must (he says) if reason " be the allotted guide, be obliged to wait at least " till that reason can bring us her report. Mean

" while,

" while, in this infidel interim, ſhould death ſur-
" priſe us, what ſhall now become of our hopes?
" —You will examine, you ſay; *thou fool, this*
" *night ſhall thy ſoul be required of thee.* When
" death has once overtaken us unfurniſhed of our
" paſſport;"—with much more to the ſame purpoſe. To all which it may very juſty be anſwered, that one in ſuch a ſtate (*i. e.*) ſuppoſed to be ſincerely ſearching after truth, with a firm reſolution to abide by the reſult, and follow the dictates of his conſcience, and in the mean time practiſing all the moral duties,—is in a very ſafe way, and will, certainly, be accepted by a merciful God. *Shall not the judge of all the earth do right?* Will he condemn an innocent creature humbly and honeſtly examining, only in order to know, that he may obey the will of his Creature, and who is actually in the habit of doing all that he, at preſent, knows to be his duty, and who thinks this very ſearch alſo his duty, that he may not be miſtaken, or prejudiced in regard to it?

Is there any thing in Scripture to diſcountenance ſuch a conduct? On the contrary, Chriſt himſelf directs it, John v. 39. *Search the Scriptures, for in them ye think ye have eternal life*, &c. And are not the Bereans commended for a like behaviour? In ſhort, if this be not juſtifiable, and acceptable in the ſight of God, what is the conſequence? why, that it is the duty of every man to be, *blindly, and without examination*, of the religion in which he happens to have been educated, be it ever ſo abſurd; and if ſo, the Chriſtian religion will have no preference to any other.

It

It is not to be queſtioned but this writer himſelf really thinks in the ſame manner, and that he has choſen the ironical way of treating the ſubject, only to expoſe the abſurdity of modern ſyſtems.

Page 20, 21, 22. " All the ingenious ap-
" plications of myſterious propheſies, and their
" references, are, in my opinion, never to be
" mentioned as arguments, and means of con-
" viction in behalf of a truth deſtined to be uni-
" verſally received. The learned, and profound
" calculation of Daniel's weeks, if religious faith
" were a matter of mere ſpeculation, would go
" far to tempt me, perhaps, into a favourable
" opinion of the criticiſm, and juſtneſs of the
" conjecture. The excellent analogy of reaſon,
" and revelation, lately communicated, might in-
" duce me yet more powerfully to acknowledge,
" at leaſt, a very great, and ſpecious appearance
" of truth in its traced connexions, and inferences,
" if the ſubject were indifferent in its conſequences,
" and I were left to myſelf to pronounce freely
" what occurred naturally to my mind, from the
" conſideration of it. But when I conſider all
" theſe enlightening lucubrations as proofs actual-
" ly inſiſted on, and whoſe force I am bound to
" admit, as calculated for the general, and ready
" uſe of all thoſe to whom the precept of be-
" lieving is addreſt; or, in ſhort, as that which
" any part of the evidence of Chriſtianity is to
" ſtand upon, or depend for its ſupport; however
" I may honour the ſagacious authors of theſe
" new lights for their particular diſcoveries, I
" cannot but draw to myſelf very different con-
" ſequences from thoſe they ſeem to expect from

" their

" their proposal of them. Instead of availing to
" convince my reason of the truth of any parti-
" cular religious system, they have a just con-
" trary effect, and suggest strongly to me, that
" such a position can never be that necessary truth
" which stands in need of such far-fetched apo-
" logies and laboured accounts to reconcile, and
" explain it. I consider all these as, in truth,
" they are, inventions of late date; and there-
" fore, at best, superfluous towards the main de-
" sign, since religion must needs, to my think-
" ing, have been equally evident, and well-esta-
" blished, long before ever these new defences
" were so happily thought of. Whenever I re-
" flect with myself, upon the general importance,
" and end of religion, I cannot found its evidence,
" by any means, on any complication of circum-
" stances to be traced out by industry, or address,
" for the illustration of its authority; I cannot but
" form to myself some more simple characteristic
" of full sufficiency always accompanying it. I
" cannot but conclude in my mind, that the
" whole force of its evidence must have been co-
" temporary with the original institution itself,
" and have been entirely complete for the pur-
" pose ever since its first publication; that ne-
" cessary truths were not revealed by halves, and
" left to be perfected afterwards, at leisure, by
" the efforts of human wit; that the evidence of
" the Gospel must have this one property of its
" great Author, to be the same yesterday, to-day,
" and for ever, and consequently must have been
" equally plain, and affecting to such as never
" lived to be in the way of these supplemental

" revelations, and who never heard a ſyllable, in " their lives, of *weeks*, or *anologies*."

Indeed what he ſays in this admirable paragraph, is not only to his general purpoſe, but juſt in itſelf, and from whence it may be reaſonably concluded (as he ſuggeſts) that the bulk of mankind are, by no means, qualified, either by natural abilities, learning, or leiſure, to enter into ſuch diſquiſitions; nor need they, for they will be obliged to act, in the affair of religion, as they, neceſſarily do, in many of the other important concerns of life, that is, they muſt accquire the beſt information, and inſtruction they can, and uſe their own judgment with it, as far as that will go, in the more difficult points; for in many others, more plain, and eaſy, they will have leſs occaſion to depend on theſe helps; and they may aſſure themſelves, that all involuntary errors, or miſtakes, will be deemed innocent, nor will it, or can it be expected, that all ſhould think exactly alike, or be abſolutely in the right in all ſpeculative points, as this writer pretends.

However, it ſeems reaſonable to ſuppoſe (with him) that the evidence of Chriſtianity cannot depend on late diſcoveries, and criticiſms of modern authors; for if it was not ſufficiently evident, in former ages, and to the preſent, without theſe learned labours, and alſo to ſuch as are not qualified to underſtand, and digeſt them, it muſt needs want that univerſal, and plain proof, which ſhould bring conviction to every mind that is open, and willing to receive the truth; and if it has not ſuch conſtantly attending it, in all ages, and all places, where it is, and has been propoſed,

then

then the Christians of those ages, and places, have embraced it without proof, or with no better than might have attended any false religion, and therefore this may be false for any thing they could, or can know to the contrary.

If it be asked, on what then does the evidence of Christianity depend? the answer will be, on the Scriptures of the Old and New Testament, but especially the New. And if it be farther asked, how we know who wrote the books that compose it, when they were written, and whether we have them as first written, with many other questions relating to their authenticity? it must be answered, that these things are known, as like circumstances are known with respect to any other ancient writings; that is, by common, or universal tradition, uncontradicted; and these can no more be rejected, than such others the best received, and most acknowledged, without renouncing the principles on which we, and all men act, and must act; that is to say, that in things, the nature of which do not admit of demonstration, we must, and do content ourselves with probability, and in many cases rest as truly, and as reasonably convinced, as by demonstration in other cases; and even where there are opposite probabilities, the greater ought to determine us; and this kind of general evidence always attends the Gospel wherever this religion is professed, and very eminently in our own country, where are also many collateral helps, and advantages within the reach, and suited to the capacities of the meanest, who, with such a degree of attention, and application only, as is in every man's power, may

abundantly ſatisfy himſelf. Nor is it requiſite, for this purpoſe, that he ſhould employ more time, and conſideration, than he may well ſpare from his other neceſſary avocations; nor is more his duty; for, after all, there will be, and muſt be, many different degrees of faith, as well as of knowledge, among mankind; nor can it, in the nature of things, be otherwiſe, while ſome have greater, and others leſs natural and acquired abilities, ſome more, and others leſs leiſure, beſides a number of caſual, and adventitious differences in other circumſtances; wherefore nothing can be more abſurd, than inſiſting on the neceſſity of a perfect orthodoxy, which is, and always will be impoſſible; and therefore cannot be required. And though the generality will be excuſed with this kind of conduct, becauſe nothing more is in their power; it does not thence follow that no more will be expected of ſome others; for to whom *much* is given, from them *much* will be required; and an improvement in proportion to the talents with which they are entruſted; theſe therefore are properly employed in ſuch reſearches; and much of that light they may acquire, in theſe ſtudies, may alſo be communicated to the underſtandings, and even ſatisfaction of thoſe who could never, of themſelves, have made the diſcoveries; as really happens in many other caſes; ſo that they are, by no means, uſeleſs, though few are qualified to make them.

Page 22. he ſays, " There might be ſtill ſome " faint ſhew of foundation or pretence, perhaps, " for our endeavouring to multiply this kind of " improved hints, and ſpeculative refinements

" upon

" upon the ſubject, if the candidates for heaven
" were all philoſophers, and ſcholars. But we
" are to remember always, that the terms of
" ſalvation are equally calculated for the benefit
" of ſuch as cannot ſo much as read; as they
" were chiefly publiſhed to the world by men
" actually under that incapacity themſelves. In
" fact, it is notorious that the *moſt*, and I might
" add, the *beſt* of every religious profeſſion, do
" never concern themſelves, the leaſt, in any ar-
" gumentative taſks, or would indeed be ever the
" wiſer for it, if they did; and thoſe few who
" pretend, or perhaps flatter themſelves, that
" they are indeed *rationally convinced* in the point,
" may yet recollect, if they will fairly own the
" truth, that they were *equally convinced* before
" the trial, or, at leaſt, had ſtrong preſages be-
" forehand, on which ſide the truth lay, and
" *intended*, in ſome meaſure, to *be convinced* at
" ſetting out."

This is, indeed, declaring, that *ignorance is the mother of devotion*; for he roundly aſſerts, not only that the *moſt*, but the *beſt* of every religious profeſſion, examine *the leaſt* into the grounds of their religion; plainly inſinuating, that the more they examined, the leſs they would believe, and as plainly recommending to every one, of every ſect, to continue in *that* of their education, whatever it may be; for nothing leſs can be inferred from the whole tenor of this paſſage: which conduct, if it be right, and had always been adopted, the Chriſtian religion itſelf (which he pretends to defend) would never have been received in the world, and the utter rejection of it,

every where, would (on these principles) be justified.

To shew that he is not misrepresented, and in confirmation of the above remarks, take what he says in p. 27.—"it is the religious man's resolution, as it is his duty, to persist in the faith he has once espoused, to his life's end.—Reduce a man once by argument from his original prejudices, however gross and absurd, and that to the most just, and well-grounded persuasion in nature, and see the consequence. Will the attachment of such a proselyte to his new light, bear any degree of proportion, ever after, to that he once expressed for those occult, and mysterious articles, which he had derived, without a syllable of controversy, from the lessons of his parents?"—P. 28. "The very presuming that we have a right to call these matters to a re-hearing, and abilities to decide in them for ourselves, is an effectual step taken towards throwing off, for the future, all that obsequious awe, and dependance, which is the life of this cause."

Can the design of the writer be mistaken by an attentive reader? Is it not evident, beyond a doubt, that he thinks established forms cannot be otherwise maintained, than by recommending, and inculcating an ignorant, blind acquiescence in, the teaching and instructions of parents, tutors, and leaders; and that the things themselves are indefensible on the foot of reason? And this seems the most charitable construction his words will bear, which otherwise must be intended to undermine Christianity itself; and indeed the following quotation would

almost,

almost, if not fully, justify the latter interpretation, for he adds, p. 29.—" Once more, as the rational " believer can never take upon him to pronounce " himself inviolably secure in his adherence to the " cause he has espoused, so neither can he pro- " mise himself *that complacency, and satisfaction* " *of mind*, resulting from the consciousness of " such a faith, which is the blessed fruit of that " true and genuine faith I contend for. For " let your common experience determine, whe- " ther that person does not enjoy his belief " with much greater tranquillity, and confidence " of spirit, who never asked himself one single " question about it, than he who by the most " elaborate discussions, and busiest search, has " attained to the utmost degree of moral assurance " in the matter." What is all this, but saying, that ignorance and enthusiasm, and the mere prejudice of education, are preferable to knowledge, and the most rational persuasion, obtained by an impartial examination? And what is the inference, but that Mahometanism is as true as the Gospel? or, in short, that any religion, of any country, in which a man has been educated, is infallibly true, because he has never had any doubt about it? But he goes on—" The philosophical " believer, who built his faith originally on the " force of arguments, may possibly find these ar- " guments not so readily occur to his memory in " those gloomy hours, when he has the most oc- " casion for their support, and consequently will " be liable, at every turn, to his misgivings and " distrusts about the sufficiency of those reason- " ings he cannot, for the present, so well recol-

" lect;

" lect; whilst he that has once arrived at the
" full, and lasting assurance of a just, and heaven-
" ly faith, can never be to seek, at any time, for
" the grounds and motives of his conviction and
" dependance; having never, for his part, dealt
" at all in the evidence of reason, he can never
" possibly have the stress of his conclusions di-
" minished or obscured by a review, or be at
" any loss to recover their original force at plea-
" sure; but must always have the same basis of
" his hopes alike established, and therefore must,
" to the end, be secure of enjoying all that peace
" of mind which *the world*, and carnal intelli-
" gence *cannot give*, without any the least inter-
" ruption from the caprice of thought, or com-
" plexion."

It cannot be denied, that there have been, and are many instances of weak enthusiasts, who have had, or pretended to have such extraordinary and full assurances, as rational believers do not boast of; but then it is also true, that there are many other instances, where the same kind of enthusiasm has produced as groundless despondings, and even despair itself in all its horrors; for its operations are uncertain, and various, according to the passions, circumstances, state, and temperament of the subject; and none but a madman would prefer its guidance, and influence to that of calm, dispassionate reason, in any affairs of importance, and especially in that of the greatest of all; and, in truth, the misguided zeal of enthusiasm has produced more terrible calamities among mankind, than any other cause whatever.

Page 49. " We find our Maſter ever diſclaim-
" ing, with the ſevereſt reſentment, all followers
" of that complexion [*i. e. ſuch as were deſirous*
" *of ſeeing a miracle done by him, as Herod and*
" *others*] and no temper checked, and diſcouraged
" with ſo conſtant an averſion, as this of, (as it
" is approbiouſly termed,) *ſeeking a ſign.* There
" cannot be, I think, a ſtronger and more ex-
" preſs reproof to all ſuch notions and contractions
" of his good offices, than that he makes uſe of,
" in jealouſy of heart, upon being applied to for
" an inſtance of this extraordinary aſſiſtance, in
" favour of the nobleman's child—*unleſs you ſee*
" *ſigns and wonders* (ſays he) *you will not believe.*—
" Indeed, ſo far from having any the leaſt con-
" nexion with the thought of procuring diſciples
" from the influence of the ſpectacle, that a cer-
" tain degree (and that no ordinary one) of pre-
" vious confidence, and perſuaſion, appears to have
" been conſtantly ſtipulated for before-hand, to
" entitle them to have their applications at all
" liſtened to, or regarded; and to be the *ſole*
" meaſure, and rule of diſpenſing theſe occaſion-
" al favours, wherever we find them conferred,
" it was ſtill firſt perceiving that *the patient had*
" *faith to be healed.* Wherever there was the leaſt
" room to diſtruſt ſuch a preparatory proviſion,
" he ſeems to capitulate, and guard, with eſ-
" pecial care, that a miracle ſhould not be, even
" accidentally, a means of converſion by diſmiſs-
" ing the petitioner with a conditional remedy
" which was to take effect only in proportion to
" his preſent qualifications of the kind, and of
" which his ſucceſs was to be the ſure teſt; *ac-*

" *cording to your faith be it unto you*, were the
" terms; as elſewhere he attributes profeſſedly
" the whole efficacy of a miracle, that had taken
" place, to that ſingle preliminary, *Thy faith*
" (that of which I found thee already poſſeſſed)
" *hath made thee whole.*"

Very ſtrong inſinuation, that more was owing to the credulity of patients and ſpectators, than to the reality of the miracles. But ſurely he forgets how often Chriſt appeals to them himſelf as the ſureſt proof of his divine miſſion.—*If ye believe not me, believe the works*; with many ſimilar paſſages. He employs many pages in proving (according to his ſcheme) that neither reaſon, nor the miracles of the apoſtolic age (which, as he aſſerts, cannot now be evidence to us) nor human learning, with leiſure, and abilities, and with all thoſe aſſiſtances which are afforded by others, the beſt qualified, are, together, ſufficient to produce a proper ſaving faith; and, after having ſuggeſted that the true, and only foundation, is the immediate inſpiration of the Holy Ghoſt to each individual—follows this paragraph, viz.

" I have been very ſhort and reaſonable in the
" computation of my demands, that I might
" come the ſooner to remark upon the conſe-
" quence, and aſk, in a word, to what purpoſe
" all theſe extraordinary ingredients of ſenſe and
" learning, and leiſure, thus almoſt miraculouſly
" aſſembled together in our ſuppoſed exami-
" ners? Why, to enable, at laſt, one, perhaps, in
" ten thouſand, to form ſomething of a *plauſible*
" *conjecture* upon the ſubject, and very poſſibly
" (what the moſt ingenious ſtudents, who have
" gone

" gone that way to work, have often had the
" hard lot to fall into) a damnable one."

What the author would, here, insinuate, is too plain to need a comment.

Page 69. He proceeds—" Can any thing
" be more natural, upon hearing of a rational
" faith, than to interrogate *(with the greatest*
" *simplicity)* after our church catechism? *Why*
" *then are infants baptised when by reason of their*
" *tender age they cannot possibly pretend to know*
" *any thing of the matter?* To represent this
" whole proceeding justly, according to the laws
" of reason, would be to give a very injurious
" image of that heavenly mystery. For this ar-
" ticle (might the invidious objector say) without
" knowing it, to believe they know not what;
" and this act, which is properly no act at all,
" is received as something, to all intents and
" purposes complete in itself, and comprising the
" whole sum and extent of a just persuasion.
" Their living longer afterwards, to be capable
" of being informed *what it is they* have promised
" to believe, may possibly endanger, but cannot
" add to the terms of their contracted happiness.
" The merits of the most finished conviction are
" already theirs by imputation; their claim to
" heaven stands already allowed, and millions
" are accordingly, *we know*, actually saved upon
" the strength of the mere ceremony, without
" ever having had the capacity of exerting one
" single thought upon that, or any other subject.
" So far are they, all the while, from knowing
" any thing *why*, that they do not so much as

 " know

" know *what* they believe; or, indeed, that they
" do believe any thing at all."

Now if this author were a Quaker, or a Baptiſt, or of any other perſuaſion rejecting infant baptiſm, what he here ſays would be not very inconſiſtent; but if he is really perſuaded that infant baptiſm, as preſcribed by the church of England, is enjoined by the Goſpel, (which is what he pretends; for in p. 9. already quoted, his words on this very ſubject are, *ſuch is the pleaſure, and ordinance of God himſelf in this point*;) then, after removing the maſk, that is, the irony under which he ſhelters himſelf, it may ſurely, without a breach of charity, be pronounced, that he cannot be a believer of this Goſpel, which, by his own account, enjoins ſuch abſurdities, unleſs he is content to paſs for the wildeſt of enthuſiaſts. And he confirms this judgment of himſelf by his very next words, p. 70, which are—" I could well en-
" large, if occaſion were, upon this head, and re-
" duce the whole ſyſtem, by each particular arti-
" cle, to that uncouth image, which, through
" the falſe medium of reaſon, it muſt ever ſtrike
" upon our ſenſes." And then he refers his reader to Lord Bacon's pardoxes, in confirmation of what he has advanced.

To ſhew the juſtneſs of the above remark on the character of this author, and his book, take the following paſſage, p. 75. " But for the ſtrong-
" eſt explanation of the truth of what I am ſug-
" geſting, that reaſon cannot poſſibly have any
" thing to do upon theſe occaſions, let me recom-
" mend you only, for one moment, into ſome aſ-
" ſembly of the faithful at their devotions. Repair,

" I ſay,

" I ſay, to the real ſcene of religious worſhip, and
" contemplate there in your mind what paſſes
" in your view, and the nature of the proceedings;
" a numerous congregation, the votaries of an
" extenſive diſtrict, and their ſtrict concurrence,
" to the niceſt punctilio, in all the doctrinal points
" there uttered, and bring me ingenuouſly your
" true judgment upon the matter. Is it poſſible
" that you will aſſert, that this harmonious flock
" are thus altogether really giving a *rational aſſent*
" to all theſe curious articles, and profound
" theorems, when your experience, in the mean
" time, aſſures you, that the generality of theſe
" unanimous confeſſors have never, in their whole
" lives, beſtowed one ſingle thought, in a ſpe-
" culative way, upon the truth or falſhood of
" that long train of propoſitions they ſo liberally
" avow? You muſt needs readily grant the con-
" trary, and fall, of courſe, into my eaſy ac-
" count of this ſtrange proceeding, owning, that
" it can be only the effect of the *ſame ſpirit*, that
" from the lips of them all, contrives to *ſpeak*
" *the ſame thing*; that by this means, though
" men cannot be all of one opinion, they may of
" one faith, which they hold not in unity of
" underſtanding, but as our liturgy well ex-
" preſſes it, in *the bond of peace, and unity of*
" *ſpirit*. A diſtinction that can alone juſtify the
" practice, which muſt be otherwiſe unavoidably
" liable to reproach for its abſurdity, and render
" its abettors very deſervedly obnoxious to the
" apoſtles cenſure of rearing altars to an unknown
" God."

Can

Can any one read this quotation and not ſee the ſneer throughout, not only in the general ſenſe of it, but in the peculiar language, and expreſſion alſo? And is it not evident, (as was obſerved at the beginning) that creeds, and articles, confeſſions and catechiſms of human compoſition, and of human impoſition, are the things which expoſe Chriſtianity to the contempt, and the ſcoffs of unbelievers? It is indeed a melancholy conſideration, that the eſſence of this religion ſhould ſuffer, in the eyes of the world, by attacks upon ſuch things as are really no parts of it; at the ſame time that it might be well, and effectually defended, if its advocates would content themſelves with what is alone defenſible, the pure Goſpel itſelf, and honeſtly give up all human forms of every kind. But the misfortune is, that many who would otherwiſe be very capable of the taſk, do ſtill however, from their education, retain ſome of theſe, which, being blended with their more authentic tenets, might expoſe them to the aſſaults of a ſubtle adverſary; while others, who by their ſtation in life, finding themſelves obliged to defend, and maintain all that is eſtabliſhed by law, as well as what is eſtabliſhed by the Goſpel only, are particularly cramped by their own ſubſcriptions, from which they think it, at leaſt, not decent to depart, whatever latitude they may, in their own private judgment, allow themſelves. Inſomuch that few who are able, and, alſo, free from theſe prejudices, and difficulties, are left to undertake the cauſe; and even if ſuch ſhould ever ſo effectually vindicate it, the generality of Chriſtians themſelves would hardly be contented, unleſs ſome of their

favourite

favourite ſyſtems were adopted, or interwoven with it.

Page 90. In ſpeaking of Boyle's lectures, he ſays, " If the motives of the credibility of Chriſ-
" tianity may be once innocently propoſed to
" examination, they may poſſibly be innocently
" rejected too. Horrid conſequence this! and
" yet but juſt. For the very making it a queſtion,
" the very adviſing me to look into it, to form a
" judgment, both ſuppoſes and allows my doubts
" for the time."

What is this, but ſaying, in effect, that Chriſtianity has, really, no better foundation than other religions in which any happens to have been educated, in any age, or country in the world? or that it is impious, and damnable to examine any, or that *all*, or *none* (ever) were of divine authority?

Ibid. he goes on, " Now, if infidelity be indeed
" juſtifiable any one moment of our lives, who
" ſhall tell me what moment it ceaſes to be ſo?
" Who ſhall take upon him to determine the cri-
" tical point, when longer want of conviction be-
" comes criminal? or ſettle the competent time
" we ought to be ſatisfied in?" *He continues*—
" O, ſays the Rationaliſt in return, as long as we
" are thus actually employed in the ſearch, we
" may make ourſelves perfectly eaſy in that point;
" God will, on his part, never certainly expect
" more of us than he enables us to perform. A
" ſincere deſire to know and do his will muſt
" ſupply, till his good time, the deficiency of
" the actual knowledge."

And

And the Rationaliſt (as he with ſeeming contempt calls ſuch an one) has anſwered very properly, that is, has ſaid all that can, in juſtice, be expected, or required. He proceeds, " So that " if we can diſbelieve, with a ſafe conſcience, " we ſhall do as well without it, as with it:— " if the allowance of our own conſcience be a " ſufficient ſecurity, it muſt be equally ſo under " every profeſſion, and then farewell to the no- " tion of one only true, and ſaving faith, and all " the conſequent care to diſcover it.——The ſin- " cere diſbelief of one ſingle perſon, were evident- " ly incompatible with the very nature and cur- " rency of this our eſtabliſhed law, an aſſent to " which is ſo peremptorily required, under the " heavieſt penalty, of all perſons whatſoever, with- " out any kind of reſervation, or diſtinction of cir- " cumſtances; which would never have been the " caſe, if any one could have been incapacitated, " without any default of his own, for the giving " ſuch an aſſent."

According to this repreſentation, every man, born in any age, or country, who has never been ſo happy as to hear of Jeſus Chriſt, and his Goſpel, muſt infallibly be damned; as well as every one under any other incapacity, of whatſoever nature, of receiving, and believing this religion: but if this were really a juſt repreſentation of any revelations, pretending to divine authority, muſt not every thinking man, upon the leaſt reflection, reject it as unworthy of God, and utterly inconſiſtent with all his attributes, eſpecially of that God *whoſe tender mercies are over all his works, who hateth nothing that he has made*, and who ap-

peals to man *that his ways are equal?* But why does this author thus repreſent, but to ſhew the abſurdity of ſuch ſchemes, which, however he may ſeem to adopt, it is plain, he deſigns to expoſe; and to perſuade the profeſſors of this religion, in general, to more candour, and proteſtants in particular to more conſiſtency with ſuch principles as they find themſelves obliged to aſſert, and maintain againſt catholics, and all other bigotted enthuſiaſts. For it is moſt evident, by his manner of treating the ſubject (throughout) that he is himſelf, a Chriſtian upon very different principles, or elſe that he is no Chriſtian at all; and it would be injurious to his good ſenſe to ſuppoſe otherwiſe, nor is it to be doubted but that he would be ſo underſtood.

Page 96, he ſays—" Believe me, they knew " what they did, they underſtood the nature of " their religion well, and conſulted her intereſt " wiſely, who have conſtantly committed to the " flames the peſtilential writings of infidels, and " their perſons too, whenever it has been in their " power, as a ſacrifice due to the ſafety of ſouls, " and to prevent any dangerous tendency from " the communication of ſuch alarms. This, I " ſay, has ever been the well-judged practice a- " mongſt the greater and more prudential part of " the champions for Chriſtianity, however ſome " daring ſpirits of them have ventured inad- " viſedly to depart from the ſalutary caution, and " taken upon them, to the great diſhonour, often, " of the advocate, and prejudice of the cauſe, to " expoſe themſelves thus unneceſſarily to all the " rude attacks of ingenious malice, to enter the liſts

" unprivileged, against private reasoners, and join
" issue with them, in their own way. That such
" condescensions to methods, and laws so foreign to
" the subject, must ever prove fatal to religion, is e-
" vident enough, if what I have been all this while
" advancing of its nature, and evidence, has indeed
" the least foundation, or support. And amidst all
" the Rationalist's extravagant, and chimerical no-
" tions of, I know not what, strict justice in the case,
" and an equal indulgence due to the advocates
" on both sides, it is not, surely, to be seriously ex-
" pected, even by his romantic self, that the well-
" grounded zeal of an enlightened preacher of the
" Gospel should really permit him to counte-
" nance, thus equitably in his own defiance, all
" the vain pretensions of these industrious mi-
" nisters of darkness in their turn, and not rather
" laudably oppose, to the utmost, all establish-
" ments of blasphemous lectures against the truth
" of religion, and the erecting of common pul-
" pits, and privileges for antichrist, avowedly to
" communicate its poison. All which, if religion
" were indeed a rational institution, were, it must
" be confessed, no more than reasonable concessions,
" and the only method for cultivating a proper
" knowledge of her pretensions, and veracity."

Is not all this asserting, in the fullest manner, that the Christian religion is entirely indefensible on the foundation of reason, and common sense? But then, by the Christian religion, he means human establishments. Now if it were true, that all the established religions in the world were indefensible, that would not, in the least, affect pure primitive Christianity. He maintains, in effect, that

that this religion is founded on mere enthusiasm, and cannot be defended, and supported, but by the secular power, with the most determined persecution: but does he not know, that though no persecutions, perhaps, have ever been more bloody, and unrelenting, than those of professed Christians against other Christians; yet that these have always been for creeds, articles, confessions, and such like, all of human invention; and an assent, to them required, only by human authority? That *Cranmer*, *Ridley*, and thousands of other martyrs, had never suffered, if they had been required to subscribe the New Testament only! And that without the impositions of such human authority, there never would, nor could have been any persecutions, by Christians, of Christians, for real Christianity neither needs, nor knows any such diabolical force, or violence, but *is mild, peaceable, gentle, easy to be entreated.* And how did this religion make its way, and support itself before it was under the protection of the civil magistrate? How! why, by its own native, genuine light, and power, and strength, and spread far and wide without human assistance, or interposition, 'till it became not only worthy the notice and attention of Constantine, but even of his policy to countenance, and embrace it; and had he been wise, or good enough to have protected its professors, only, against foreign injuries, without interposing any farther, posterity would have had much more reason to have blessed his memory, than for all the worldly emoluments he annexed to the profession of it. So that it is true in fact, notwithstanding all the pretences of this author,

and in direct contradiction to his assertions at the beginning of this quotation, *that those who understand the nature of this religion* best, and consult its interests most wisely, will never have occasion to recur to human policy, and, least of all, to force, and violence, and persecution for its support.

Page 98. " We are taught, in our liturgy, to " pray that God would give our magistrates *grace* " *to maintain truth*; which surely implies too a " previous grace already given to determine it. " This consciousness of their own inspired cer- " tainty, is the only justifiable warrant that could " be, in nature, for such a proceeding. If there " were the least *possibility* of their being *mistaken* " themselves, they could never answer it, in any " light, to God, or man, thus to discourage, or " restrain their fellows from enquiries, so essen- " tial to their forming a belief on any just founda- " tion.——If we will suppose, whenever we see " him (a magistrate) exerting such an authority, " that our prayers have taken effect in his behalf, " and that he is ever prevented in his choice, by " the unerring instructions of the holy spirit. " From no other principle, doubtless, would " these *nursing fathers* take upon them to interest " themselves so far in the sentiments of their " wards, as to tempt them into the right way by " professed bribes, and encourage the faithful, by " throwing the conveniencies of life into the " scale. The making it thus men's *temporal in-* " *terest* to be persuaded of one particular way; " would be an unsurmountable obstacle in the " way of all fair examination, and for ever fatal

" to

" to the uſe of reaſon, if ſhe were to be concern-
" ed. There could not, taking things in that light,
" be a more odious and flagrant inſtance of ab-
" ſurd partiality, cruelty, and oppreſſion, than
" the impoſing of any preſcribed opinions, as the
" terms of ſociety; nor could humanity juſtify,
" in any degree, all thoſe wholeſome ſeverities,
" with which they now ſecond the certain awards
" of heaven, but that they muſt appear to be
" moſt monſtrouſly wicked, and unjuſt, if reaſon
" were our appointed guide, ſince it might then
" frequently happen, that men might incur the
" ſevereſt puniſhments by the moſt innocent con-
" duct, and for actions abſolutely out of their own
" power."

One cannot wiſh a more able pleader in behalf of univerſal toleration, and againſt every kind, and degree of perſecution, whether poſitive, or negative. And, by the very expreſſions, and particular epithets he has choſen, it is manifeſt, that he is warmly intereſted in the cauſe, and has only covered, and ſhielded himſelf with irony, that he might the more freely, and without reſtraint, ſay all that he thought proper on the ſubject. Now, ſuppoſe the irony entirely ſet aſide, has he not fully proved, that neither magiſtrate, nor any other man, or men, have a right to exerciſe any authority (or at all to interpoſe) in matters of religion, that is, in reſpect to the *credenda*, but that it is an affair ſolely between God and a man's own conſcience, and that he is accountable to no one elſe, nor ought to ſuffer any the leaſt injuries for his opinions, as ſuch. In the next pages he expoſes the abſurdity of obliging the young ſtudents

at

at universities, to subscribe articles, as if they had already sufficiently examined, and had formed their creed, for life, never after to depart from it, or any part of it; and represents the horrible temporal inconveniencies that will certainly attend their ever discovering the least doubt on any point for the future.—And then he proceeds to shew the folly and unfairness of prejudicing children in their home education.

Page 110.—" Such a scheme, as that of unanimity upon this subject, can be by no other " possible method to be effected, than that I have " been contending for, of a *constant and particular revelation imparted separately, and supernaturally to every individual.* And how much " more absolutely satisfactory then must it be to " a *Christian seeker*, if, upon searching into his " own Scripture account of the matter, there " appears to be indeed *this very method*, which " we might so naturally expect, there exactly " described, and set forth to us for the purpose?"

If by personal inspiration only, it may as well be communicated (that way) to such as are born out of Christendom; and then, it is no advantage to be within the pale of the church, and all the benefits of education are nothing in this view of the matter.

He goes on—" If all that I have hitherto been " urging may have had the wished effect to remove only the contracted incumbrance of this " one fatal and fundamental prejudice—*That it* " *is by reasoning, that you are to come to the knowledge of all necessary truths*, my only remaining

" part

" part is, to offer up my moſt ardent prayers in
" your behalf at the throne of grace, *not for*
" *leiſure* for you to conſult, *or ſagacity* to appre-
" hend all the acute leſſons of a *Hammond*, or a
" *Grotius* upon the ſubject, but that God would
" be pleaſed *himſelf to illuminate, and irradiate*
" your mind, with a perfect, and thorough con-
" viction of the truth of his holy Goſpel; and
" that the ſame holy ſpirit that firſt dictated that
" divine law, would powerfully ſet to his ſeal,
" and atteſt its authority in your heart; that he
" would be graciouſly pleaſed to vouchſafe to re-
" new, once more, his diſregarded notice, and
" eſtabliſh in you an uncontrovertible know-
" ledge of its veracity, ſuch an one as that (with
" the enlightened apoſtle) you may at once, *be-*
" *lieve, and be ſure that Jeſus was the Chriſt.*
" Such a full, and home-felt perſuaſion, as will
" render ſuperfluous all your further care, and
" purpoſed labour in the ſearch, by fixing you
" *in the happy inſtant*, a true, a zealous, and un-
" alterable diſciple of Chriſtianity."

He has, before, in ſeveral places, inſiſted on the abſolute neceſſity of all men thinking exactly *alike*, and all perfectly right. And, here, of ſuch an unanimity as, he very truly ſays, can be by no other poſſible method effected, *than by a conſtant, and particular revelation imparted ſeparately, and ſupernaturally, to every individual*; but where has he authority for ſo peremptory and ſo extraordinary an aſſertion? And does it appear in fact (among even the beſt of Chriſtians) that this is the caſe? Alas! ſo far otherwiſe, that we may well cry out, if this be indeed neceſſary, *who then*,

or

or how *few then* can be ſaved? Perhaps no two, in the world, think exactly alike; nor can this be neceſſary in the opinion of any but fanatics, and enthuſiaſts; and when we are exhorted to be of one mind, that unanimity is plainly intended of the heart, rather than the head, as the *ſtrong* are admoniſhed *to bear with the weak*, and not to offend ſuch for whom Chriſt died, notwithſtanding they differ in ſentiments from thoſe others ſaid to be ſtronger; and though one thinks that to be lawful which another does not, neither of them is condemned, it is only recommended to both, to follow their own proper conſciences, becauſe to him only that thinketh it ſin, to him it is ſin, nor is any thing more than this one article required of all abſolutely, to believe and acknowledge, viz. that Jeſus is the Chriſt.

On conſidering the latter paragraph of this quotation, detached from, and unconnected with, the reſt of his book, it is difficult, and almoſt uncharitable not to believe him piouſly in earneſt; but when all the foregoing parts, of this ſame book, are laid together, and the peculiar language of it remarked, it is as difficult not to conſider it, as a profane and impious piece of mockery, and though (in Chriſtian charity) one may forbear to pronounce it ſuch, yet, be it the one, or the other, the doctrine pretended to be inculcated is equally abſurd in itſelf, in that it deſtroys all *moral agency*, as well as all uſe of our reaſoning faculties, and repreſents mankind as mere machines, and, in no reſpect, ſuch kind of creatures as God Almighty has been pleaſed to make them, and is utterly inconſiſtent with all the methods of his

providence in dealing with them, and not leſs ſo, with all the notices of his will declared, and all the ways of his treating them in the Scriptures both of the Old, and New Teſtament.

Page 113.—" Indeed the ſitting down to ex-
" amine into the truth of religion at this time of
" day, cannot but appear, to my ſenſe, a very
" ſtrange kind of language from one in your ſitu-
" ation. From a native of *California*, or the *Cape*,
" there might perhaps be nothing ſo extraordina-
" ry or unbecoming, to hear of ſuch a propoſal.
" But you diſclaim, it ſeems, in your philoſophi-
" cal ſufficiency, all the partial advantages of your
" birth, and education, (though many would eſ-
" teem themſelves not a little favoured in the di-
" ſtinction:) but the notion of *local merit*, as you
" expreſs yourſelf, the being born to *particular*
" *privileges*, and *beholden to accident*, as you call
" it, for *true opinions*, are circumſtances your ra-
" tional ſpirit can, by no means, digeſt, which
" is as much as to ſay, [That you are reſolved
" to reap no benefit from the covenant of grace,
" except you are to have the preſcribing the
" means yourſelf; and that you will be content
" to accept of ſalvation only upon your own
" terms, and in your own way.] For tell me,
" you that are ſo induſtriouſly looking out for
" the proofs of Chriſtianity, are you not then
" (the while) a Chriſtian? Are you not, at this
" inſtant, a baptized, and covenanted Chriſtian?
" And is not this being indeed a Chriſtian to all
" intents and purpoſes already, and in the way
" that God himſelf has preſcribed us?"

This ſeems his favourite topic; again upon infant baptiſm, and the received orthodox notions concerning it, with the miraculous effects attending it; but does this author, really, believe, that the baptized infant of a Chriſtian, dying, is in a better ſtate, or ſhall be more happy hereafter, than that of a *Californian*, or of the *Cape*? Or that there is any ground to think ſo, either from the principles of natural, or revealed religion? In the latter it is aſſerted, *that God is no reſpecter of perſons, and that he hateth nothing that he has made*, and *that his tender mercies are over all his works.* Beſides, if it were true that peculiar privileges, and advantages were annexed to the ceremony of baptiſm, does it follow, on any principles, that when a baptized perſon is arrived to manhood, he ſhould entirely depend on ſuch advantages, and never concern himſelf farther, during the remainder of his life? Is he ſo certainly, and indubitably in poſſeſſion of *true opinions* by the accident of his birth, and parentage, his baptiſm, and education, that it is not only needleſs, but dangerous to make any enquiry about them? And would not this have been the caſe wherefoever he had been born? Or muſt he as certainly have been damned had he been born in Turky, or China, or in Africa?

There is nothing in the New Teſtament to countenance ſuch ſtrange opinions, but its whole ſcope, and tenor, is of, quite, another complexion; there we are admoniſhed *to examine whether theſe things are ſo*, and thoſe who did, were commended for this inquiſitive diſpoſition; and we are directed to work out our ſalvation with *fear and trembling*,

trembling, and leaving the things that are behind to press forward, to be watchful and diligent to make our calling, and election sure, lest after having begun well, we should become *castaways*; *not as if we had already attained, but still to press forward towards the mark, &c. not to be weary in well doing*, for he only *that perseveres to the end, shall be saved*: and in the account of the last day, the *come ye blessed, and go ye cursed*, are pronounced not upon the baptized, or unbaptized, as such, no, nor upon the orthodox believers, or unorthodox, as such, but upon the morally good, and morally bad.

He adds, page 114.—" Does not plainly the in-
" fant's belief answer as effectually all the de-
" mands of the Gospel, as that of the first pro-
" ficient, and highest *graduate in Divinity?* And
" is it not accepted (if not preferred) as at least
" an equal claim to all its rewards with that of
" the best of them?"

But if this were true respecting the infant, as an infant, does it follow, that nothing more is required of an adult? And indeed it is directed, by our church, that he should *now* discharge his sponsors, and take upon himself, *personally*, the obligations under which they had laid themselves on his account; and ought he not, therefore, to examine for himself, that he may see, and know what he undertakes? Or is this a matter of less importance than any other whatsoever? for in all others, he would certainly act in this manner.

He adds, "—Be content, in God's name, to be
" even as good a Christian only, *as your sister*,

 " whom

" whom you cannot doubt to be equally entitled
" to all the means of grace, and hopes of glory,
" with the *proudeſt philoſopher*, who is even *wiſer*
" *than the aged*, becauſe a meek, and humble diſ-
" ciple of that true *wiſdom which cometh from*
" *above*. No, if we do but *once heartily and*
" *truly believe*, it is a very invidious, as well as
" ſuperfluous diſtinction, to concern ourſelves a-
" bout, whether we know, by the teſt of our
" underſtandings, *upon what grounds* we believe,
" or not."

We are indeed directed to pray with the *underſtanding*, but *it ſeems*, we may believe *without*; in ſhort, he might as well have added, that ſince it is needleſs to concern ourſelves *upon what grounds*, or *why* we believe, we need, as little, concern ourſelves *what* we believe; for if we know not on what grounds, it is plain we may believe *without grounds*, and if ſo, we may believe any thing. And all this he would ſeem to maintain on the principles of the church of England, at leaſt, if not of the Goſpel itſelf.

He goes on—" Be ſatisfied, henceforth, that
" there is *a kind of evidence*, of power beyond
" what reaſon can ever pretend to furniſh, ſuch
" as brings with it that cordial peace, and aſſu-
" rance of mind, to which all *conviction, by hu-*
" *man means*, is an utter ſtranger, ſuch as you
" ſee can enable your pious mother, without any
" of the repeated advantages of academic inſti-
" tution, to pronounce with ſo much peremptory
" juſtice on all religious caſes, and reprove, with
" ſo good a grace, all the well gloſſed hereſies of
" a lettered *Clarke*."

What a ſneer! And would not this good woman, *with the ſame kind of evidence*, and with the ſame aſſurance (to which, as he ſays, all conviction *by human means is* an utter ſtranger) have as peremptory pronounced, had ſhe been bred a Quaker, a Roman catholic, or even a Mahometant? and no doubt, with equal piety, and ſincerity. Indeed, as to the aſſurance of her mind, and the peremptorineſs of her deciſions, they are always the effects of ignorance, bigottry, and enthuſiaſm; for thoſe who have moſt knowledge, candour, and reaſon, are never ſo poſitive, but find ſufficient cauſe for diffidence of their own judgment, and deference to that of others, and are therefore inclined to make generous allowances for difference in opinion. And if he would pretend, or have it thought that he pretends, ſhe muſt neceſſarily be in the right, becauſe thus confidently aſſured; the ſame may be ſaid of the wildeſt fanatics that ever exiſted.

Page 115.—" It ſhould, one would imagine, " be conſideration ſufficient to deter your en- " gaging in your preſent enterprize, that, in the " firſt place, this reaſon will, in all probability, " never have the effect propoſed of confirming " our faith."

How ſo? Is it then a faith, for which (in truth) no good reaſon can be aſſigned? Has it no foundation but that of education only? If this be really the caſe, it has no better title to our regard than any of the falſe religions in the world; and, on ſuch a diſcovery, the wiſeſt conduct would be to give it up. But if it has a better foundation, it may ſurely be diſcovered; and if ſo, then it is well

well worth the while to examine, and a confirmation, in consequence of such examination, will be a valuable acquisition.

Ibid.—" And, in the next place, it will be superfluous, if it has, (*i. e. the effect proposed of confirming you, &c.*) and that you are, at present, as well without it; for—what if even this caution of mine against the attempt should chance, at last, to find you already actually convinced, by reason in form, of the truth of all these matters as they stand related to us; what conclusion can you take upon you to draw from the success you have personally found in the experiment? Can you assure yourself—that you shall continue what you are for an hour together? Or—may not the same perspicuous proofs that have determined you to pronounce so confidently for their conclusiveness, possibly take a very different turn, in different hands, affect your next neighbour in a quite contrary light, and leave him as confirmed an infidel?—Though you, by the particular advantages of your turn, and education, may be indeed able to do that justice to the merits of the cause, as to trace them in all this cogent force to the amount of a demonstration; of what significance and weight can you expect all this to prove towards the affecting of minds altogether unversed in the practice of drawing inferences, and deductions, and which must therefore necessarily continue all the while in the dark, even amidst all those glaring lights which your discerning sight can discover round them?—Therefore men should be very cau-

" tious

" tious of being inſtrumental in the tempting
" any into ſceptical controverſies, there being,
" as I have before remarked, no proviſion made
" either by God, or man, for ſincere infidelity,
" as a poſſible conſequence of a fair enquiry into
" the merits of religion. *He that believeth not,*
" *ſhall be damned.* No exceptions, or allowances
" whatſoever, for any profeſſing to have uſed all
" poſſible means of information, and remaining
" ſtill diſſatisfied."

He manifeſtly ſhews, that the very evidence for Chriſtianity is (in his opinion) weak, uncertain, and capable of a contrary interpretation to its diſadvantage, even ſo much as probably to confirm his neighbour an infidel. And how fully ſoever he may poſſibly be convinced himſelf by the proofs to be collected for that purpoſe, it is by no means proper to lay them before ſuch as are not accuſtomed to draw inferences, and deductions; whereas it muſt needs be, that the proofs in queſtion are of a nature ſuited to the commoneſt capacities, are few, and obvious, and require no other kind of deductions, than ſuch as all people make, in the ordinary affairs of life, without ſo much as knowing that they reaſon logically, though they do ſo every day. And indeed, if religion were not a ſubject ſuited to the capacity of all, they could not, nor would have any concern in it, or be at all accountable about it. Nor is there ſuch danger, as he would be thought to apprehend, in putting people on examination, either of their becoming infidels by that ſearch, or of their eternal perdition if they ſhould; while honeſtly, and ſincerely employing

all

all the means in their power to discover the will of God, and their own duty, with a firm resolution to obey him, and perform it, as far as they shall be enabled to acquire the knowledge of them. And as to the denunciation, *He that believeth not, shall be damned*, let it be understood as any such expression would be interpreted in any other book, that is, according to the rules of common sense, and the meaning is plainly this, and no more, that, he (among those to whom the Gospel is preached with sufficient evidence) that shall reject it, shall be condemned; not those who never heard of the name of Christ, or to whom this Gospel was never properly proposed; for such have not so much as heard the denunciation itself, and therefore can never fear it: if these are condemned, it is for disobeying the light they have, and not for disobeying that which they have not; for every one shall be judged according to that which he hath, and not according to that which he hath not. And if (as this author says) *no exceptions, or allowances whatsoever are made in the text*, the reason, in this, and an hundred other such cases, is not because none will be made, but because the nature of the thing speaks for itself, to the common apprehensions of all mankind, and who always, in every other case, necessarily, make such interpretation, else no language would be intelligible without perpetual circumlocution: but such explanation in the present and some other subjects would be altogether needless, were it not for superstitious systems built on more detached sentences; which systems these writers find it easy to demolish, and then triumph as if they

they had deſtroyed the very foundation of our religion; and the misfortune is, that thoſe who have adopted theſe ſyſtems (as the true ſenſe of the Goſpel) know not how to defend it, becauſe they dare not give up what they weakly apprehend to be eſſential to Chriſtianity; whereas, had they learnt their religion from the Scriptures only, and made uſe of their underſtandings in reading them, as in reading other books which they think themſelves intereſted to comprehend, (and without the particular prejudices of education, which indeed are often great) they would not find ſuch peculiar difficulties in anſwering their adverſaries, nor would theſe (but for the ſyſtems above-mentioned) have ſuch apparent advantages on their ſide, or rather (having no fair handle preſented to them) would never have attempted the ſubject, as this very performance (or at leaſt by far the greater part of it) is levelled at mere human inſtitutions that have no warrant in Scripture.

Page 117. " But once more, what if, after " all (which may likewiſe poſſibly happen to be " the caſe) the powerful evidence on the ſide of " religion ſhould indeed fail in its influence, and " not appear ſatisfactory enough to you to enforce " the profeſſion of it? What if, on the other " hand, the ſpecious gloſſes of infidelity ſhould " poſſibly happen to obtain, at laſt, even in your " own opinion upon this ſcrutiny; if the plauſi- " ble pretext of ingenious ſophiſtry ſhould prove " ſo far of force in the queſtion, as unhappily to " miſguide your reaſon, by their artful repreſen- " tation of the cauſe of error? Why, the ſince-

" rity of your intention, *you ſay*, will acquit you, " becauſe you have done your beſt: your juſt " judge, *you ſay*, can never expect of you to do " more than is in your power, or to be convinced " ſooner. Which is as much as to ſay, that you " will either do what God commands you, or " take care to come prepared to juſtify your refu- " ſal, to his ſatisfaction; never obſerving the " while, that all your reaſonings, of this ſtamp, " are grounded upon the monſtrous ſuppoſition, " that God would enjoin a thing that you ſhould " be able to give ſolid, and ſubſtantial reaſons for " not complying with. Strangeſt deluſion ſure! to " go directly contrary to your Maker's expreſs " command, and yet flatter yourſelf with hopes " of being provided with a ſufficient excuſe for " your diſobedience. *Behold, to obey is better than* " *ſacrifice*, and to comply, than to be making " apologies."

Far otherwiſe, for it is from a ſenſe of his obligation to comply with the will of God (when known) that he enters upon this examination, with the fulleſt reſolution to receive whatever ſhall appear to be ſuch. He does not ſee, is not convinced, that God has enjoined what he refuſes to comply with, nor pretends that any reaſons could juſtify him, in ſuch a refuſal; on the contrary, believes he complies with God's will, in rejecting whatever appears to want the proper evidence, that would certainly attend a divine inſtitution, and is ready to embrace, with all humility, and the moſt unreſerved obedience, whatſoever carries the marks of his authority.—And indeed, he cannot reject any pretended revelation on other grounds,

grounds, than for want of ſufficient, and proper proof, of its being, really, what it pretends to be. And if this will not juſtify him, after a rational and impartial examination, to the beſt of his abilities, he muſt receive all, how contradictory and inconſiſtent ſoever, that offer themſelves to his notice, and cannot be excuſed in rejecting any; but if it be ſaid, in anſwer, that there can be but one ſuch, truly divine, for God cannot contradict himſelf, what follows? Why ſurely, that we are to examine which, if any, carries with it the ſtamp of divine authority; ſo that the receiving one, and rejecting all the reſt, manifeſtly muſt depend on ſuch examination; for there are, and have been, many ſuch, each of which has been received in ſome country, and by ſome people; as there is no one of them all that has not been rejected by ſome country, and ſome people, not excepting our own, and generally that of the country where people are born, are educated, and reſide, is received as authentic by them: ſo that had we been born in Turkey, all the arguments throughout this whole book, would have been juſt as good, and concluſive *there*, for Mahometaniſm as, *here*, for Chriſtianity; and therefore they are of no manner of weight, againſt a fair, and candid examination, without which a man may embrace the groſſeſt abſurdity for divine revelations, as many have done. And indeed without which, this nation itſelf had never been Chriſtian, nor (after having received this religion under the ſanction of popery) had ever become proteſtant, nor had the church of England (*ſeemingly* ſo extolled, and preferred in this very pam-

phlet) been ever eſtabliſhed; nor the pious ſiſter, and mother, of the perſon to whom it is addreſſed, been ſuch ſound, and orthodox proteſtant Chriſtans. So that the writer argues moſt abſurdly, and inconcluſively, taken in any other light than as a continued irony: but ſo taken, his arguments appear to be the ſtrongeſt that can well be propoſed, againſt what he pretends to maintain.

But now ſuppoſe a man in Tartary, in Perſia, or even in ſome parts of what is called Chriſtendom, yet ſo unhappily ſituated with regard to the proper evidence, for the Goſpel, as a divine revelation, that he is not convinced of its truth, what ſhould be done in that caſe? Should a man ſay he believes when he does not? Should he make a profeſſion, contrary to the dictates of his heart, of his beſt judgment, after the moſt deliberate, ſerious, and ſincere ſearch? Is this his duty, is this what he is commanded to do? *It would be indeed a monſtrous ſuppoſition, that God ſhould enjoin a thing that we ſhould be able to give ſolid, and ſubſtantial reaſons for not complying with* (as this writer ſays;) but this monſtrous ſuppoſition is his own, for he no where finds in the New Teſtament any ſuch kind of injunction. Thoſe who are required to believe, are always preſumed to have abundant, and ſufficient evidence before they give their aſſent; and where ſuch evidence is not afforded, faith is never required, *Wo! unto thee Chorazin, wo! unto thee Bethſaida, for if the mighty works which have been done in thee, had been done in Tyre, and Sidon, they would have repented long ago*, &c. with many, very many, other ſimilar

paſſages,

paſſages, all plainly intimating, that what is expected, and required, is always in proportion to the evidence afforded: hypocriſy cannot be acceptable to the Deity, profeſſing, with the lips, to believe, when the heart contradicts that profeſſion, cannot be the thing commanded, *My ſon, give me thine heart.* In ſhort, God is juſt, and good, and cannot act in a manner inconſiſtent with his moral attributes. We know there are millions who never heard of the glad tidings of the Goſpel, and many others to whom the notices of it have been ſo ſlight, and imperfect, and ſo blended with abſurdity, as to afford no proper proofs of its divine original, as in China, Japan, and other countries; and perhaps, alſo, in ſome parts even of Chriſtendom, ſuch weak, and inconſiſtent ſyſtems have been adopted, and the people ignorant of any other Chriſtianity, than that ſyſtem, that many, even in theſe parts, have not been able to trace out a clear proof of its truth; it ought therefore to be concluded, on the whole, as a general maxim, that to whomſoever ſufficient evidence has not been fairly propoſed, of theſe, faith cannot, and will not be required, but they, and all others, will be judged righteouſly, and mercifully, by the all-wiſe, and good creator, and governor of the univerſe.

Nothing here advanced, is deſigned as any excuſe for ſuch as have the means of information in their power, and neglect thoſe means, and leaſt of all for ſuch as are convinced, and make not the proper profeſſion, or that do not lead lives anſwerable to their profeſſion; againſt theſe the threatning is truly levelled, theſe indeed ought to ap-

prehend, and dread it, in its full force, for against such it is plainly denounced, nor could any other be intended.

He concludes with these words, " I shall now " release you from all further attendance, with " the most cordial admonition of one, who has " indeed a *father's* concern, and interest in all " your success. Its meaning, at least, I think " you must allow, whatever exceptions you " may possibly find to its authority. *My son, trust* " *thou in the Lord with all thy heart, and lean* " *not unto thine own understanding.*"

The admonition is very good, and its obvious meaning is, that you should place an entire confidence in God, and his providence, and not think that you are sufficient of yourself, or an independent being; and this sense of the words is confirmed by the next which follow, viz. *In all thy ways acknowledge God, and he shall direct thy paths*, Prov. iii. 5, 6. But how good soever the admonition may be, in itself, on what account is it applicable to the present subject? As to the words—" *lean not unto thine own un-* " *derstanding*," they are evidently in opposition to the former part of the verse—" *trust in the* " *Lord with all thy heart*," as above explained,—and as confirmed by the subsequent verse, and cannot, with any propriety, be interpreted to signify, *make no use of your understanding in matters of religion*, which is the only interpretation that can serve the cause of this author.

And now the author of these observations hopes he has made it appear, that the piece in question is a continued irony throughout; and that

that (this maſk being removed) the writer's arguments, how concluſive ſoever they may be againſt certain ſyſtems, and opinions, and practices, are never the leſs far from being ſo againſt real, primitive, goſpel Chriſtianity, which ſtands on another and better foundation, than that of human inſtitution.

FINIS.